

Finding discounts for people with disabilities



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Savvy Senior

Question: Are there any worthwhile discounts available to people with disabilities, and if so, how can I find them? My wife — who's 48 — has multiple sclerosis that now requires her to use a wheelchair.

Answer: There are actually a wide variety of discounts and services available to people with disabilities and those living with a chronic illness that can literally save you hundreds and even thousands of dollars each year.

Here are some tips to help you find them.

• **Always Ask:** The first thing to know is that most businesses that offer discounts to people with disabilities or their escorts don't publicize them, so it's important to always ask.

Also note that most nonprofit organizations and government agencies that provide disabled services or benefits will require proof of disability through a letter from your doctor or some other form of verification before they will accommodate you.

• **Taxes:** There are numerous federal tax deductions and credits available to people with disabilities, and a number of states and counties also offer property tax deductions.

• **Utilities:** Many utility companies, including electric, gas, phone, water and trash services offer discounts to customers who are disabled, elderly or low income.

• **Communication devices:** 47 states have equipment distribution programs (see ted-pa.org) that offer free amplified telephones to residents with hearing impairment.

• **Home modifications:** There are a number of federal, state, local and nonprofit organizations that help pay for home accessibility improvements like wheelchair ramps, handrails and grab bars.

• **Travel:** Amtrak offers a 15 percent rail fare discount to adult passengers with a disability and up to one traveling companion.

• **Search Locally:** The disabled discounts available to your wife will vary depending on where you live, so a good place to start is to contact the local chapter of the nonprofit organization that specializes in your particular disease or disability — in your wife's case that would be the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (nationalmssociety.org, 800-344-4867).

Local chapters often know where to find discounts on the medical supplies, mobility equipment and support services. Some organizations have even negotiated special discounted rates with suppliers, and a few even provide subsidized equipment directly.

To search for other disability or disease specific organizations, use any Internet search engine, and type in your disease or disability followed by organizations — for example "Arthritis Organizations" or "Hearing Loss Organizations."

• **Search Online:** DisabledDiscounts.com is one of the best resources for finding disabled discounts online. This is a free website that lists thousands of discounts in all 50 states. You search by state and county in 30 different categories ranging from assistive technology to federal and state tax discounts, entertainment to education and so much more.

Also visit Benefits.gov and BenefitsCheckUp.org.

INTRODUCING ...

This month, we begin a new feature on the Do It! page: Savvy Senior, a syndicated information column for older Americans and their families. Writer Jim Miller is also a contributor on NBC's "Today" show and the author of "The Savvy Senior, The Ultimate Guide to Health, Family and Finances for Senior Citizens" (Hyperion).

You can send questions to Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org.

two great sites that will help you look for financial assistance programs your wife and you may be eligible for, and will tell you how to apply. And see Disability.gov, a site that connects people with disabilities to helpful programs and services in your area.

• **Types of Discounts:** Here are a few examples of the different types of disabled discounts and services that are out there.

• **Recreation:** Most movie theaters, museums, zoos, theme parks and aquariums provide reduced admission to people with disabilities or their escort. And, the National Park Service offers the "America The

Beautiful Access Pass" (see nps.gov/findapark/passes.htm) to disabled residents, which provides a lifetime of free access into all national parks and federal recreational lands.

• Reading services:

For those with vision or physical impairments that make it difficult for them to read, the Library of Congress (see loc.gov/nls) offers a "Talking Books" program that provides free audiobooks, magazines and audio equipment. The National Federation of the Blind offers a free newspaper and reading service at nfbnewslinesonline.org.